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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2874
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1222
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3261
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2647
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 000139

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/16/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: KYRYGZ MFA WESTERN COUNTRIES DIRECTOR TARRED BY
CIGARETTE SMUGGLING SCANDAL

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Classified By: Ambassador Tatiana C. Gfoeller, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Western Countries Chief Kanat Tursunkulov, has become embroiled in a scandal involving cigarette smuggling through the Kyrgyz Embassy in London's diplomatic pouch. He confided to DCM that he was detained by the intelligence service for two days, and plans to check into a hospital to avoid being fired. He believes he can escape prosecution, but it will cost him money, and the scandal has taken him out of the running for high-profile jobs. On Manas Air Base, Tursunkulov claimed that FM Sarbaev had only reluctantly signed the document he sent to Parliament on the closure of the Base, and that he is someone the U.S. can "talk to." End Summary.

12. (C) On February 16, DCM received a call from MFA Western Countries Chief Kanat Tursunkulov, who is under investigation in connection with the smuggling of cigarettes via diplomatic pouch. Tursunkulov wanted to clarify his situation, and agreed to stop by the DCM's residence that evening. Tursunkulov explained that two brothers had run the pouch smuggling scheme. One of them had approached Tursunkulov, seeking a letter to Customs to allow a small shipment of personal effects to be sent through the pouch. Tursunkulov provided the letter, which he told DCM the brothers then photocopied, cut and pasted and used for subsequent smuggling of cigarettes through the pouch.

Two nights in GKNB detention

13. (C) The smuggling scheme was uncovered in December, and was one factor in the sacking of First Deputy Foreign Minister Kadyrov. The investigation, led by the law enforcement arm of the intelligence service, the GKNB, led to Tursunkulov's name on the letters used. Tursunkulov told DCM he was hauled into GKNB headquarters for two days last week for interrogation. He was finally released through one of his wife's contacts. Tursunkulov noted his disappointment that neither current Foreign Minister Sarbaev nor his

predecessor, Karabayev, lifted a finger to get him released. Tursunkulov claimed both had offered to help him when he first came under suspicion.

Taking Political "Sick Leave"

14. (C) Tursunkulov claimed he had also been contacted by and met with Marat Bakiyev, President Bakiyev's brother who is Ambassador to Germany. Marat called Tursunkulov, prior to his detention, to ask what all this was about regarding the smuggling case. Tursunkulov said that Marat had indicated that the suspicions had nixed Tursunkulov's chances to be promoted as a new Deputy Foreign Minister or as the new Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor, all positions for which Tursunkulov claimed Marat had endorsed him. Now, Tursunkulov said, he planned to check into a hospital (Kyrgyz law prevents employees from being fired while hospitalized) for two weeks to let things die down. "I'll be out of touch for awhile," he smiled, "but will contact you again when I'm back."

Career hopes dashed

15. (C) Tursunkulov was optimistic he could avoid prosecution -- "I'll have to pay something, of course," he said, but the incident would damage his career. "I'm thinking I'll try to become DCM in Brussels; the Ambassador there has been trying to get me to come for over a year." Tursunkulov acknowledged that his long-time aspiration to become Ambassador to the UN was now out of reach. He said some friends and family had urged him to leave the country, but others encouraged him to stay and clear his name, and that was what he has decided to do.

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Manas -- Talk to Sarbaev

16. (C) In response to a question about the current impasse over the future of Manas Air Base, Tursunkulov urged the Embassy to reach out to FM Sarbaev. "You can talk to him," Tursunkulov said, adding that although Sarbaev signed the papers to close the Base, he did so reluctantly and does not support the decision to rely on Moscow. Tursunkulov explained Sarbaev's actions by noting that he is young and ambitious and took the job to advance his career.

Comment

17. (C) Tursunkulov has been a reliable Embassy contact for many years, and his likely departure from his current posting spells the loss of yet another valued interlocutor. It is also an indication of the degree to which the MFA is in disarray, given the recent sweeping personnel changes at the top.

GFOELLER